



HEARD ACROSS MONTANA

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IM Weekly Highlights



- Three towers at PSIC-funded sites are near completion. A new tower was installed at the XL Heights site this week along with the re-installation of the tower at VC Pass site. The new tower for Lost Creek is scheduled to be flown in and stood in place today, July 30.
- Aviat Networks' subcontractor, Dunne Communications, installed microwave antennas at the Red Mountain site this week that will support connectivity to the trunking equipment at the site along with providing connectivity into the Butte 9-1-1 trunking site as well as connectivity into the backbone for Beaverhead County.

Funding Options Bring Diverse Consortia Responses

By Ian Marquand, IM Public Affairs and Outreach
marquand.im@gmail.com

Interoperability Montana (IM) and Public Safety Services Bureau (PSSB) representatives presented proposed funding models to more IM consortia this past week and received diverse recommendations in response. The presentations were designed to provide guidance to IM Project Directors as they prepare to make a final decision on funding elements for the new IM business plan at their August 10 meeting.

IM and PSSB have been asking three main questions of consortia:

- 1) What funding model do you prefer? A flat fee (based on either county population or tax base) or a "per user" fee estimated at \$200 per radio?
- 2) When should fees start being assessed?
- 3) How much should IM reimburse counties/tribes for site maintenance? (IM estimates costs to be about \$11,000 per site.)

At its July 26 meeting in Butte, a majority of I-15/90 Consortium members chose to support a population-based "membership fee" for counties and tribal

governments, with no limits on how many radios can join the system. They also agreed that fees should be assessed as soon as a jurisdiction starts using the system. In terms of reimbursement, I-15/90 members preferred receiving a full \$11,000 per site.

In Missoula on July 27, Western Consortium members preferred a per user fee, to be assessed once radios come on the system. However, it was suggested that the fee be set at different levels based on expected use of the system. There was no clear consensus on the amount of reimbursement, although it was suggested that counties could continue to pay their own costs and be permitted to place a certain number of radios on the system in return.

At the July 28 meeting in Kalispell for western members of the Northern Tier Consortium, members opted for a population-based flat fee for counties/tribes to be assessed at the beginning of the next fiscal budget year following join-up to the system. (In other words, counties would not be charged for the budget year in which they join the network.) This group preferred a reimbursement scenario in which counties receive 50% of the total site maintenance amount, with the other half placed into a pool for emergency repairs or other unexpected site costs.

Finally, the Big Sky 11 Consortium met in



Members of the I-15/90 Consortium listen to Carl Hotvedt, Public Safety Services Bureau Chief, at their July 26 meeting.

Billings on July 29. That consortium favored user fees as the revenue source, which should be assessed once radios come on the system. On the reimbursement question, the Big Sky 11 preferred providing counties with 50% of the total and placing the other half into an emergency pool.

Here are a few other significant issues brought forth during the week's meetings:

- Members of the I-15/90 and Northern Tier (West) consortia asserted that IM should not try to limit the number of users who have access to the system and should, in fact, strive to bring on virtually all potential users.
- Participants at the Western and Big Sky 11 meetings suggested that IM's estimate that 20% of all eligible users would come onto the system is too low. In Billings, it was noted that increasing the number of users would have a positive financial effect, either through reduced user fees or a larger share of local funding.
- When asked whether they have concerns about having state government financing a large majority of IM operations, responses ranged from "locals would be better off financing 51% in order to retain control" to "the state should finance almost all of it; we don't care what that means for local control." In other words, a variety of views on this issue still remains, although there seems to be agreement that users should contribute a minority share, with the state providing a substantial majority share.

IM Leaders Speak to Legislators

By Ian Marquand, IM Public Affairs and Outreach
marquand.im@gmail.com

On Wed., July 28, IM Executive Director Kevin Bruski and this author, Ian Marquand, appeared before the Montana Legislature's Energy and Telecommunications Interim Committee (ETIC in legislative shorthand—not to be confused with the IM's Eastern Tier Interoperability Consortium). Kevin thanked committee members for the opportunity to share the IM story with them and outlined the IM legislative wish list for 2011.

After that, I gave a longer presentation on the concept of Statewide Interoperability, its importance to Montana and the role IM plays in making it possible. Some committee members had constructive questions and expressed their interest in promoting public safety. They saw value in the IM

project, even though some admitted that the presentation was their first real exposure to it.

The committee's chair, Rep. Robyn Driscoll (D-Billings) is very interested in feedback IM received from its current round of consortia meetings, especially the July 29 Big Sky 11 session. The committee's vice-chair, Sen. Jerry Black (R-Shelby), also was very engaged and interested.

One of the more interesting parts of the Q & A was with Sen. Ron Erickson (D-Missoula). He asked about future staffing and financial needs. After Kevin explained what operations, maintenance and administration of the full system might cost per year, Sen. Erickson suggested that the statewide property tax levy might be a source of money to pay for ongoing costs. He used the state's 6-mill levy for higher education as a model. (For the record, one mill levied statewide raises about \$2.1 million per year, according to the committee's Legislative Services staffer).

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The session was an excellent opportunity to tell the IM story to a group of key legislators.

Upcoming Meetings

- **Mon., Aug. 2**
IM Technical Committee (IMTC)
Helena • 9:00 am – 3:00
MACo Large Conf. Rm., Lower Level, 2715 Skyway Dr.
- **Wed., Aug. 4**
Tri-County Consortium
Helena • 10:30 am – noon
IM Offices at MACo, 2717 Skyway Dr.
- **Thurs., Aug. 5**
Mobile Data Terminal Consortium
Bozeman • 10:00 am – noon
SAR Bldg./Gallatin County EOC, 219 E Tamarack
- **Mon., Aug. 9**
IM Finance Committee
Helena • 9:00 – noon
Anderson ZurMeuhlen, 828 Great Northern Blvd.
- **Mon., Aug. 9**
IM Governance Committee
Helena • 9:00 – noon
Anderson ZurMeuhlen, 828 Great Northern Blvd.
- **Tues., Aug. 10**
IM Project Directors Meeting
Helena • 9:00 am – 5:00 pm
MACo Large Conf. Rm., Lower Level, 2715 Skyway Dr.